

## REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

Educator Effectiveness

May 2019

### Question:

*What does the research say about the different types of tasks that teachers and principals work on, and how much time do they typically spend on each?*

### Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on the types of tasks teachers and principals spend time on and how much time is typically spent on those tasks.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

### Research References

Camburn, E. M., Spillane, J. P., & Sebastian, J. (2010). Assessing the utility of a daily log for measuring principal leadership practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(5), 707–737. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ904241>. Full text retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1ada/bd1b3b53584cc73dfe75c964e9d78bc093a8.pdf>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Purpose: This study examines the feasibility and utility of a daily log for measuring principal leadership practice. Setting and Sample: The study was conducted in an urban district with approximately 50 principals. Approach: The log was assessed against two criteria: (a) Is it feasible to induce strong cooperation and high response rates among principals with a daily instrument? and (b) Can daily logs accurately measure important aspects of principal leadership? The first criterion was assessed through a discussion of data collection procedures and results. The second criterion was assessed through mixed-method analyses comparing daily logs,

observations, and an experience-sampling instrument. Results: The authors found that substantial participant contact time and strategic follow-up achieved strong cooperation and yielded high response rates. The accuracy of the log was confirmed through comparisons with an experience-sampling instrument and direct observations. The results also contribute to a broader understanding of how principals allocate their time across leadership domains. Like earlier structured observation studies, the authors found that principals spend more time on management, personnel issues, and student affairs and less time on instructional leadership than advocated by leadership scholars and professional standards. Implications for Research and Practice: Daily logs appear to be a viable means of measuring important aspects of principal practice and overcoming measurement errors associated with one-time surveys that are common in leadership research. Strategies used to maintain high participation rates are discussed in detail, and an example of a district's adaptation of the daily log methodology is provided."

Goldring, E., Huff, J., May, H., & Camburn, E. (2008). School context and individual characteristics: What influences principal practice? *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(3), 332–352. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ796588>. Full-text retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235313844>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* "Purpose: As they operate in complex schools principals must allocate their attention to numerous responsibilities. This paper seeks to ask three questions: how do principals allocate their attention across major realms of responsibility; to what extent do principals in different contexts emphasize different realms of responsibility; and to what extent do individual attributes affect how principals allocate their attention across realms? Design/methodology/approach: A cluster analysis is applied to data from a daily log of principal practices to identify principals who allocate their attention across major realms of responsibility in similar ways. With the three groups identified in the cluster analysis a discriminant analysis is then used to examine the individual attributes of the principals and the contexts within which these groups work to identify those individual characteristics and contextual conditions that best predict each principal's cluster membership. Findings: The data from the log indicate that principals are not as fragmented across numerous realms of responsibility as previous research suggests. Some principals do spend considerable time on instructional leadership. The cluster analysis revealed three groups: 'Eclectic' Leaders (their activities are distributed more evenly across different activities); Instructional Leaders (they focused most on Instructional Leadership); and Student Leaders (they emphasized student affairs). In the paper's discriminant analyses no individual attributes distinguished amongst the three types of principals; only contextual conditions predicted membership. Research limitations/implications: The results point to the influence that context plays on school principals' practice; principals appear to prioritize and focus their actions under more challenging contextual conditions. The next step in the analysis is to determine how the leadership clusters and principal practices relate to important school outcomes. Originality/value: The paper provides useful information on influences on school principals' practice."

Grissom, J. A., Loeb, S., & Master, B. (2013). Effective instructional time use for school leaders: Longitudinal evidence from observations of principals. *Educational Researcher*, 42(8), 433–444. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1019297>. Full-text retrieved from [https://my.vanderbilt.edu/jasongrissom/files/2012/05/time\\_use.pdf](https://my.vanderbilt.edu/jasongrissom/files/2012/05/time_use.pdf).

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Scholars have long argued that principals should be ‘instructional leaders,’ but few studies have empirically linked specific instructional leadership behaviors to school performance. This study examines the associations between leadership behaviors and student achievement gains using a unique data source: in-person, full-day observations of approximately 100 urban principals collected over 3 school years. We find that principals’ time spent broadly on instructional functions does not predict student achievement growth. Aggregating across leadership behaviors, however, masks that some specific instructional investments predict year-to-year gains. In particular, time spent on teacher coaching, evaluation, and developing the school’s educational program predict positive achievement gains. In contrast, time spent on informal classroom walkthroughs negatively predicts student growth, particularly in high schools. Additional survey and interview evidence suggests this negative association may arise because principals often do not use walkthroughs as part of a broader school improvement strategy.”

Grissom, J. A., Loeb, S., & Mitani, H. (2015). Principal time management skills: Explaining patterns in principals’ time use, job stress, and perceived effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(6), 773–793. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071166>. Full-text retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281612201>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Purpose: Time demands faced by school principals make principals’ work increasingly difficult. Research outside education suggests that effective time management skills may help principals meet job demands, reduce job stress, and improve their performance. The purpose of this paper is to investigate these hypotheses. Design/methodology/approach: The authors administered a time management inventory to nearly 300 principals in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the fourth-largest school district in the USA. The authors analyzed scores on the inventory descriptively and used them to predict time-use data collected via in-person observations, a survey-based measure of job stress, and measures of perceived job effectiveness obtained from assistant principals and teachers in the school. Findings: Principals with better time management skills allocate more time in classrooms and to managing instruction in their schools but spend less time on interpersonal relationship-building. Perhaps as a result of this tradeoff, the authors find that associations between principal time management skills and subjective assessments of principal performance are mixed. The authors find strong evidence, however, that time management skills are associated with lower principal job stress. Practical implications: Findings suggest that building principals’ time management capacities may be a worthwhile strategy for increasing time on high-priority tasks and reducing stress. Originality/value: This study is the first to empirically examine time management among school principals and link time management to key principal outcomes using large-scale data.”

Heafner, T. L., & Fitchett, P. G. (2015). Principals' and teachers' reports of instructional time allocations in third grade. *Journal of International Social Studies*, 5(1), 81–100. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1149448>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Using a paired national cross-section of third grade teacher and principal Schools and Staffing Survey data from 2007 to 2008, comparisons were made regarding teachers' and elementary principals' reports of instructional time distributions for English Language Arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and reading in third grade during a full week of school. Examining how the two most fundamental personnel of schools converge and diverge in their reports of instructional time allocations, allowed researchers to compare, first, how teachers and principals report instructional time uses by subject area, and second, to determine if there were differences in reported time allocations between teachers and principals. Researchers were specifically interested in determining if reported time provided evidence of educational problems associated with instructional time as there were conflicts in: (1) time as a function of administration and (2) time as a function of the classroom. Furthermore, results yield evidence of marginalization of social studies at the classroom level.”

Hornig, E. L., Klasik, D., & Loeb, S. (2010). Principal's time use and school effectiveness. *American Journal of Education*, 116(4), 491–523. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ890461>. Full-text retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu/~sloeb/papers/Principal%20Time-Use%20%28revised%29.pdf>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “School principals have complex jobs. To better understand the work lives of principals, this study uses observational time use data for all high school principals in one district. This article examines the relationship between the time principals spent on different types of activities and school outcomes, including student achievement, teacher and parent assessments of the school, and teacher satisfaction. We find that time spent on organization management activities is associated with positive school outcomes, whereas day-to-day instruction activities are marginally or not at all related to improvements in student performance and often have a negative relationship with teacher and parent assessments.”

Lavigne, H. J., Shakman, K., Zweig, J., & Greller, S. L. (2016). *Principals' time, tasks, and professional development: An analysis of schools and staffing survey data* (REL 2017-201). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569168>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “This study describes how principals reported spending their time and what professional development they reported participating in, based on data collected through the Schools and Staffing Survey by the National Center for Education Statistics during the 2011/12 school year. The study analyzes schools by grade level, poverty level, and within poverty level by whether schools made adequate yearly progress on student performance the previous year. Overall, principals reported spending an average of 59 hours a week on the job, with most of their time spent on internal

administrative tasks. Principals of high-poverty schools that did not make adequate yearly progress reported spending more time on the job per week than did principals of high-poverty schools that made adequate yearly progress. Regardless of school poverty level, principals of schools that made adequate yearly progress reported spending more time on administrative tasks, curriculum- and teaching-related tasks, and parent interactions than did principals of schools that did not make adequate yearly progress. Though almost all principals reported participating in professional development, the most frequently reported type was workshop or conference attendance, and the least frequently reported type was university courses. An appendix describes the methodology used in this report.”

Sebastian, J., Camburn, E. M., & Spillane, J. P. (2018). Portraits of principal practice: Time allocation and school principal work. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(1), 47–84. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1165390>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine how school principals in urban settings distributed their time working on critical school functions. We also examined who principals worked with and how their time allocation patterns varied by school contextual characteristics. Research Method/Approach: The study was conducted in an urban school district with approximately 50 school principals and utilized self-reported End of Day log data collected at multiple points in between 2005 and 2007. We utilized hierarchical linear models to analyze variation in principals’ time allocation by time (hour, day, semester), school function (building operations, student affairs, district functions, etc.), and school personnel (self, teacher, student, etc.). Findings: Variation in principals’ practice is domain dependent. Consistent with prior research, we find that a principal’s workday is characterized by long hours and diverse tasks. We find little support for the notion that typical tasks are characterized by brevity. Principals also spend most of their time working with within-building colleagues rather than working alone. Of all predictors we examined in the study, only hour of the day predicts principals’ time allocation on different functional domains. Conclusions: The portrait of principals’ work described in this study expands and enriches the field’s current understanding of how principals allocate their time across the multiple domains of responsibility that require their attention. We find that our data offer support for some of popular conceptions of principals’ work described in the research literature while challenging other common conceptions.”

Sebastian, J., & Moon, J.-M. (2017). Gender differences in participatory leadership: An examination of principals’ time spent working with others. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 12(8). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1172437>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “The purpose of this study was to examine whether female principals have a more participatory style compared to their male counterparts by examining principals’ daily time allocation patterns. The study analyzed data from End of Day (EOD) survey logs from principals in an urban school district in the United States. Results from hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) showed that female principals, when compared to male principals, spent a higher proportion of their time working with others in planning/setting goals. At the same time, there were no differences in how principals



allocated their total time working alone or working with others and their time distribution in other leadership domains. The findings suggest that gender differences in leadership style depend on specific activity domains and that there are significant differences in the key domain of strategic planning.”

Vannest, K. J., Hagan-Burke, S., Parker, R. I., & Soares, D. A. (2011). Special education teacher time use in four types of programs. *Journal of Educational Research*, 104(4), 219–230. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ928247>. Full text retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233248495>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “The authors examined, by direct observation and 1 hr interval self-reporting, teacher time use in 4 types of special education programs (adaptive behavior units, content mastery, coteaching, resource room). Over 7,000 pieces of data were collected across an academic year from 31 teachers in 24 schools within 9 districts in the Southwestern United States. Interrater reliability was established with concurrent observers visiting classrooms. Differences between program types were reliably established, with some of those differences anticipated and others not. Across programs, an average special education teacher time use profile also was plotted, with interesting findings including only 20% of class time spent on academic instruction and nearly 17% spent on special and general education paperwork. The implications are described for teachers and administrators and for policy.”

Van Vooren, C. (2018). An examination of K-5 principal time and tasks to improve leadership practice. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 29(1), 45–63. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1172214>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “This study highlights the high rates of attrition among school leaders that result from increased demands on school principals. This article reports on a unique university and school district partnership that worked together in action-based, community-engaged research to address the time allocation and tasks in the daily life of principals. The findings highlight the complex and changing roles in the daily work of school principals. Moreover, this study serves as a model for community engagement and exemplifies how universities and districts can work together to improve school leadership.”

## Methods

### Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- [(“principal time use”) OR (“teacher time use”)]
- [(“principal time allocation”) OR (“teacher time allocation”)]
- [(“principal use of time”) OR (“teacher use of time”)]
- [(“teachers’ management”) OR (“teachers’ use”) of time]

- “teacher workload” time and tasks
- teacher time on workload

### **Databases and Resources**

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.7 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

### **Reference Search and Selection Criteria**

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2004 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

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This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.